UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/52/584
10 November 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-second session
Agenda item 157

UNITED NATIONS REFORM: MEASURES AND PROPOSALS

Note by the Secretariat

During the course of the open-ended informal consultations of the plenary on agenda item 157, the Secretariat responded to comments and queries raised by delegations on 21 and 28 October 1997. The information concerning the actions is made available to Member States in the present document.

97-30773 (E) 101197

/...

Secretariat response to comments and queries

1. The Secretary-General thanks all delegations for their contributions. He notes the interest shown by delegations and appreciates the depth of their comments.

2. The Secretary-General wishes to reiterate that, in developing his reform measures and proposals, careful account was taken of the considerable body of information, analysis and recommendations resulting from the deliberations of Member States in the General Assembly and its relevant working groups. Account was also taken of proposals made by groups of States and by individual States, recommendations emanating from independent commissions and other bodies, and from the reports prepared by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Joint Inspection Unit and the Board of Auditors.

Action 1. Senior Management Group

3. The establishment of the Senior Management Group is an initiative of the Secretary-General intended to ensure more integrated and cohesive management of the Secretariat. The Group has already been established and meets on a weekly basis. It is not an independent decision-making body or a separate management layer. The functions of the Group are as follows:

(a) The Senior Management Group serves as the Secretary-General's senior advisory and central policy planning body to ensure strategic coherence and direction in the work of the Secretariat;

(b) The Senior Management Group will advise the Secretary-General on all matters of policy preparation and implementation that affect the Organization as a whole, and will also serve in a crisis management capacity.

The Senior Management Group neither duplicates any existing management instrument nor adds a new layer of bureaucracy.

4. The essential difference from previous practice is that a formal mechanism has been put in place; the functions of the group are clearly defined; the objectives of the meetings between the Secretary-General and the senior officials have been established; a regular schedule exists for the periodicity of these meetings; and the composition of the Senior Management Group is transparent. The Group deals solely with issues that fall within the administrative responsibility of the Secretary-General.

5. The composition of the Senior Management Group is reflected in the Secretary-General's bulletin on the subject (ST/SGB/1997/3).

Action 2. Strategic Planning Unit

6. A Strategic Planning Unit is being established to assist the Secretary-General in identifying and analysing emerging global issues and trends. In proposing its establishment, the Secretary-General is responding to a felt need for a "think-tank" within the Secretariat. The Strategic Planning

Unit will not have direct line authority, for it will serve as a mechanism for integrating information communicated by a range of United Nations departments, funds, programmes and research institutions and will concentrate, in particular, on cross-cutting issues. It will draw on those other capacities and not duplicate them. The need for cross-cutting analysis has become increasingly evident as the areas of work of the distinct sectoral approaches of United Nations entities are more and more interrelated. The establishment of the Strategic Planning Unit is not linked to the establishment of the post of Deputy Secretary-General. The Unit will, in fact, provide support to the Secretary-General directly as an integral part of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. The budgetary requirements for the Strategic Planning Unit are set out in document A/52/303.

Action 3. Gratis personnel

7. The statistics regarding the Secretariat's use of gratis personnel were presented to the General Assembly in the Secretary-General's report (A/51/688 and Corr.1 and Add.1-3). As at 31 October 1996 the total number of all gratis personnel, consisting of type I, namely, technical cooperation experts (238), and type II gratis personnel, including 112 for the United Nations Special Commission (442), stood at 680. In A/51/688/Add.2, the Secretariat reported a total of 202 type I and 334 type II gratis personnel at 31 March 1997. Data for Special Commission personnel had been excluded as explained in that document. The Secretariat is now collecting the most recent data (end September 1997) for an updated report for issuance in November. Preliminary indications are that the use of gratis personnel has declined further.

8. The phase-out plan will concern type II gratis personnel, taking into account the requirements of the Criminal Tribunals and the support account for peacekeeping operations. A report on the phase-out was requested by the General Assembly and will be submitted in time for the discussion scheduled for 20 November 1997. The report detailing the impact of the phase-out of gratis personnel is scheduled for submission on 16 March 1998.

9. As to the use of the dividend for development in this connection, the Secretariat is of the view that the phase-out of gratis personnel is not an appropriate use of the dividend, whose use is restricted to development projects; no gratis personnel are currently assigned to such functions.

Action 5. Department of Political Affairs (focal point within the United Nations for post-conflict peace-building)

10. With respect to action 5, in post-conflict situations the Department of Political Affairs has been accorded a focal-point role within the Secretariat to assist the Secretary-General in ensuring coherence in the activities of all relevant entities of the United Nations, in recognition of the fact that such solutions require a multifaceted approach. The Department will work in close collaboration with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other development entities, in line with General Assembly resolution 47/120 B. This decision does not mean that the Department is acquiring operational responsibilities or substantive capacity in the development area.

Action 6. Disarmament

11. In this area, the Secretary-General sought to respond to the interests of Member States for more information by circulating document A/51/950/Add.4, which represents a progression of the Secretary-General's thinking, bearing in mind comments made by Member States on this particular action. That document also gives the Secretary-General an opportunity to ensure that the emphases regarding the work programme of the Secretariat in this area are fully presented. It may be recalled that this is the one subject which, in the informal list of measures of proposals of 7 October 1997, was reflected in all three categories: actions under implementation; actions requiring budgetary consideration; and recommendations to the members of the General Assembly. The part of the proposal relating to the post of Under-Secretary-General falls under the second category, while the question of the programme of the department falls under the third category. The Secretary-General fully recognizes that the question of the programme of work on disarmament requires the consideration and concurrence of Member States.

Action 7 (a). Substantive Economic and Social Council secretariat

12. The Secretary-General is gratified by the broad support which has been given to his proposal to provide future substantive support to the Economic and Social Council through the setting up of an identifiable substantive secretariat headed at a senior level. The substantive secretariat would, in particular, support the work of the high-level, coordination and operational activities for development segments of the Council. In addition, it would play an integrating role vis-à-vis the other substantive units in the new Department of Economic and Social Affairs which support the subsidiary machinery of the Council as well as other parts of the system contributing to the work of the Council.

Action 7 (b). Department of Economic and Social Affairs and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development review of their activities in the macroeconomic area

13. Regarding the action to rationalize the work of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Secretary-General will keep Member States fully informed about the outcome of the ongoing consultations. He fully anticipates that the distinctive contribution of these two entities will be preserved. The purpose of the present consultations is to strengthen the respective roles of the Department and UNCTAD by further reinforcing complementarities, in full accordance with legislative mandates.

Action 8. Drug control and crime prevention

14. The Secretary-General is gratified by the many comments that have been made expressing appreciation for his determination to give a higher profile to the work of the United Nations on drug control and crime prevention, including terrorism, money laundering and trafficking in women and children. As Member States are aware, Mr. Pino Arlacchi has assumed his duties as Head of the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. The new Secretariat arrangements in Vienna will provide a common managerial structure designed to foster synergies

between the drug control and crime prevention work programmes as well as to stimulate the establishment of joint programmes on matters of common concern. The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs will continue to operate as separate bodies pending a decision of Member States on the Secretary-General's proposals recommending the merger of the two commissions. It should be stressed that, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, the balance in the work of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) between combating drug trafficking and other components of drug control, including activities aimed at prevention and rehabilitation and the reduction of illicit supply through alternative development, will not be affected (A/51/950, para. 145).

15. The Secretary-General wishes to emphasize that the establishment of the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention is essentially a managerial and administrative action. The mandates and programmes of work of the narcotic drugs and crime prevention and criminal justice entities will not be affected. The Secretary-General is committed to implementing those mandates and programmes. At the same time, he is of the view that there are areas which could benefit from joint action and the promotion of synergies. It is for this purpose that the Secretary-General has put in place Secretariat arrangements that provide a common managerial structure.

Actions 9 (a) and (b). United Nations Development Group

16. The Secretary-General appreciates the widespread support which has been given for the establishment of the United Nations Development Group. The establishment of the Group envisages operations that will take place at both the global and the local levels. The Secretary-General wishes to clarify that what is intended as constituting counterpart arrangements refers to actions pursued at the local level which are consistent with common approaches developed at the global level. The corresponding mechanisms to be established at the national level will preserve access arrangements for the constituent members of the Development Group and will enable them to respond more effectively at the country level to the needs and priorities of Governments.

Action 10. The United Nations at the country level

17. With regard to the question of accrediting the Resident Coordinator to the head of Government, it should be stressed that this proposal does not seek to expand the responsibility of the Resident Coordinator into areas not currently covered. Specifically, the Secretary-General is not proposing that the Resident Coordinator should undertake new and additional responsibilities in the political area. The Secretary-General wishes to emphasize that the sole purpose of this action is to enhance the capacity of the Resident Coordinator to provide leadership and coordination in the field in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly on the matter. The Secretary-General is keen that the Resident Coordinator be given the necessary status at the country level to better equip him/her to carry out his/her role as leader of the United Nations country team. Accreditation of the Resident Coordinator will be consistent with the provisions of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

Action 11 (a). Burden-sharing arrangements

18. The Secretary-General has invited Member States to consider establishing a new system of core resources consisting of voluntary contributions and negotiated pledges to be made available in multi-year tranches for the financing of United Nations programmes and funds with the objective of ensuring greater reliability and predictability of resources for development activities. In order to facilitate consideration by Member States of this recommendation, he has indicated in action 11 that he will make proposals to Member States on the manner in which this new system would work. Preparation of the necessary proposals has been entrusted to the United Nations Development Group, which will shortly be providing options for the Secretary-General's consideration.

Action 12. United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations Centre for Human Settlements

19. The Secretary-General notes the interest expressed by Member States in his proposals for the strengthening and restructuring of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. The Secretary-General is consulting with Governments and the heads of both entities, and will make his recommendations to the General Assembly at its next session.

20. With regard to the suggestion in the report that the operational projects at the country level that have been financed by the Fund of UNEP can now be more appropriately funded by UNDP and other sources (A/51/950, para. 177), this is a suggestion which the Secretary-General would wish to explore further with Member States and seek their views on the matter.

Action 13. Humanitarian affairs

21. The Secretary-General is pleased with the positive response to his decision to establish an Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in place of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The Secretary-General is also pleased with the support provided by Member States to his view that the new Office should return to the functions originally elaborated in General Assembly resolution 46/182 which are essentially non-operational. The operational functions of the present Department of Humanitarian Affairs will be distributed to the competent operational entities within the United Nations, including its funds and programmes. Discussions have not yet concluded with regard to the disposition of all the operational functions involved, but Member States will be informed once decisions have been taken. With regard to demining activities, that function has been transferred to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. An Executive Director has been appointed for the Iraq programme which will now operate as a separate entity. In relation to the transfer to UNDP of capacity-building responsibilities, proposals for a contribution to UNDP for this purpose are reflected in document A/52/303. The Secretary-General is confident that the level of operational funding previously provided to these functions will be maintained under the new arrangements.

22. With regard to the question of designating a lead agency at the country level, the criteria to be applied will be worked out by the Emergency Relief

Coordinator in close collaboration and with the support of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Member States will be kept fully informed of developments in working out these criteria, which will be applied on a case-by-case basis. It should be noted in this regard that current arrangements whereby resident coordinators normally take the lead in the case of emergencies, whether they are man-made or natural, will continue in place.

Actions 14 and 15. Human rights

23. The World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, section II, para. 17) called for a continuing adaptation of United Nations human rights machinery to the current and future needs in the promotion and protection of human rights. The medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 (A/51/6/Rev.1 and Corr.1), in paragraph 19.2, provides that the human rights programme is under the responsibility of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. General Assembly resolution 48/141, establishing the post of High Commissioner, provides that the High Commissioner shall be the United Nations official with principal responsibility for United Nations human rights activities under the direction and authority of the Secretary-General. The establishment of a single office gives structural expression to both.

24. It may be recalled that the Centre for Human Rights, as an organizational unit, was itself established by the Secretary-General in 1982 in response to a request by the General Assembly that he consider redesignating the then Division of Human Rights as a Centre for Human Rights. This decision was taken within the ambit of the Secretary-General's administrative authority under the Charter of the United Nations and that same authority empowers the Secretary-General to make further administrative arrangements necessary to furthering the efficiency of the Secretariat and enabling it to respond to changing circumstances and to the various decisions of the General Assembly. In the present case, the Vienna Declaration, the medium-term plan, the High Commissioner's mandate and efficient use of resources all support a unified Secretariat structure servicing the human rights programme.

25. The functions assigned to the Office of the High Commissioner (see ST/SGB/1997/10) are those set out in the medium-term plan, paragraphs 19.1 to 19.3 as regards the overall responsibilities, and paragraphs 19.4 to 19.9 as regards the particular units. Those responsibilities were also described in the Secretary-General's report on restructuring the Centre for Human Rights (A/C.5/50/71). The medium-term plan and ST/SGB/1997/10 expressly include responsibilities of the High Commissioner provided for in General Assembly resolution 48/141, in particular paragraph 4. There is no contradiction, inconsistency or incompatibility between the responsibilities of the single Office and the mandate of the High Commissioner. The Deputy's responsibility will be to assist the High Commissioner in carrying out her functions as head of department as set forth in ST/SGB/1997/5, section 5, and any other substantive and administrative assignments as decided by the High Commissioner.

26. With regard to the 'cross-cutting' participation of the Office of the High Commissioner in the work of the Executive Committees on Peace and Security, Economic and Social Affairs, Development Operations and Humanitarian Affairs, this measure was taken in lieu of establishing a separate executive committee on

human rights. Had an Executive Committee on Development Operations not been established, for example, the Administrator of UNDP would have been required to participate across the board in the work of the Executive Committees.

Action 17. Civil society

27. The United Nations has substantially expanded its involvement with civil society actors in recent years. This expansion can perhaps be traced to the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, where Governments agreed both to new procedures intended to attract wider participation of civil society actors and to new modalities to enable them to contribute to substantive deliberations.

28. As noted in the Secretary-General's report, non-governmental organizations are the clearest manifestation of what is referred to as "civil society", that is, the sphere in which social movements organize themselves around objectives, constituencies and thematic interests (A/51/950, para. 207). The number of non-governmental organizations that now have official status with the United Nations has increased greatly in all three categories of formal relationships: those officially accredited through the Economic and Social Council, whose numbers have expanded from 41 in 1948 to some 900 in 1991 and to 1,829 at present; those which have established official links with the United Nations through accreditation for conference purposes on substantive issues; and those accredited to the United Nations through the process of the Department of Public Information. A fourth category comprises those non-governmental organizations that have official ties and formal working relationships with the United Nations funds and programmes and the specialized agencies, many of which are active at the operational level.

29. The actions outlined in the Secretary-General's report are essentially aimed at augmenting the capacity of the United Nations to organize itself so as to relate more effectively to those non-governmental organizations as a result of their increased involvement with the Organization following intergovernmental initiatives. The Secretary-General proposes no broader opening for civil society and non-governmental organizations in the intergovernmental process and the United Nations system than that already agreed on by Member States themselves. For example, the decision to have all substantive departments designate a non-governmental organization liaison officer is in direct response to the demonstrated need to facilitate more transparent and effective channels of communication. It is also in recognition of the fact that the new non-governmental organizations tend to have an interest in specific issues rather than a general interest in the work of the United Nations. They are consequently, keen to interact directly with the substantive departments.

30. The Secretary-General is building on these experiences to interact with leaders of various civil society sectors more broadly, so as, for example, to enhance their understanding of the United Nations and elicit their support for mandated United Nations activities; to stimulate more extensive teaching on the United Nations; and to encourage more intensive research and training on subjects related to the mission of the United Nations.

31. On the business side, the Secretary-General is concerned that the benefits of globalization are not universally shared; indeed, they are highly concentrated. Accordingly, he plans to enlist the help of the business community to increase the number of developing countries that are recipients of significant amounts of investment flows and have access to international markets.

32. For more routine interactions between the business community and the United Nations, the Secretary-General has recommended to the Administrative Committee on Coordination that it consider establishing an enterprise liaison service as a joint administrative measure. Its mission, structure and funding would parallel those of the existing Non-governmental Liaison Service. As already mentioned in his report, the Secretary-General is in the process of consulting with the Committee on this action, which has not yet been implemented. Once agreement has been reached within the Committee on the modalities for establishing the enterprise liaison service, including financial implications, should there be financial implications, full information will be provided to Member States.

33. With regard to the involvement of non-governmental organizations from developing countries in the work of the United Nations, it may be recalled that it was on the basis of a proposal by the Secretariat that the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/31, widened access of national non-governmental organizations to the intergovernmental machinery of the United Nations. This proposal was designed to increase the participation of southern non-governmental organizations. It may be further recalled that, at all recent United Nations conferences, the Secretariat has called for the establishment of trust funds to ensure participation of such organizations from the South.

34. With regard to the series of gatherings involving eminent leaders of different sectors of civil society, it should be noted that it is planned to hold these gatherings in various parts of the world. Specifically, it is intended to organize them not only at United Nations Headquarters but also at other major United Nations centres, namely, Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi and the headquarters of the various regional commissions. It should be added that no financial implications for the regular budget are anticipated in respect of such gatherings.

Action 18. Human resources management

35. As indicated in his report, the Secretary-General is establishing a Task Force on Human Resources Management. The Secretary-General confirms that the work of this Task Force will be in the context of relevant resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly. The Secretary-General is convinced, nevertheless, that, within the context of his administrative authority, the time has come to take an in-depth and wide-ranging look at the United Nations approach to human resources management. An important element in this regard is the need to delegate maximum authority and responsibility for human resources management to programme managers on the basis of clear systems and lines of accountability. The Secretary-General will keep Member States informed of progress in the establishment of the Task Force. As in the case of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, he will provide Member States with the results of the work of the Task Force, as

well as his own proposals regarding the actions he intends to take in response to the recommendations of the Task Force.

Action 19. One-time training and redeployment programme

36. With regard to the issue of providing up to $15 million from appropriated resources for the establishment of a one-time training and redeployment programme, no additional resources are being requested.

Action 20. Senior appointments

37. The Secretary-General has sought the advice of a balanced range of individual advisers on his senior appointments since he assumed office. At the same time, he will continue to benefit from consultations with Member States on such appointments. He is determined to seek the widest possible spectrum of views to ensure that his appointments are of the highest calibre.

Action 21. Dividend for development and Development Account

38. The enthusiastic response to the Secretary-General's proposal for a "dividend for development" and establishment of a Development Account has been noted with appreciation by the Secretary-General. Further information on this matter is provided in document A/51/950/Add.5. As he indicated recently to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Secretary-General believes that operation of the Development Account should be based on the following four criteria:

(a) First, the resources to be released would go to regular budget programmes and not to programmes being undertaken by the United Nations funds and programmes;

(b) Second, the resources would remain in an identifiable account so that they can easily be kept track of;

(c) Third, the decision on the utilization of the resources would be entirely in the hands of Member States although the Secretariat would make suggestions as to their use;

(d) Fourth, the "dividend for development" would underwrite new and topical activities rather than activities of a longer-term character.

The Secretary-General wishes to point out that it is his intention to utilize existing Secretariat structures in implementing this measure.

Actions 25 and 26. Procurement and human resource management processes, and common services

39. With regard to actions 25 and 26, the Secretary-General takes this opportunity to confirm that he will proceed in the implementation of his actions taking full account of existing legislative mandates. With respect to the establishment of common services, it should be emphasized that the purpose is to save on administrative costs in the interest of making additional resources

available for substantive projects and programmes. The Secretary-General will continue to keep Member States informed of progress in the implementation of his actions.

Action 27. Electronic United Nations

40. The benefits of electronic dissemination of information must be widely spread among Member States, including at the level of missions at United Nations Headquarters, Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi, at the regional commissions and the country level. The Secretariat, as well as the funds and programmes, particularly UNDP, will continue to work closely with Member States to ensure that wide access is assured. In particular, the Secretariat has been cooperating closely towards this end with the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics of the Economic and Social Council and will continue to do so. The Secretary-General looks forward to the report of the Working Group. The Secretary-General will fully take into account the needs of developing countries and ensure that United Nations documents will be accessible also in cases where electronic communication is not available.

Action 29. United Nations University, research institutes and related bodies

41. The Secretary-General has indicated in his report that there is a need to ensure that overlap and duplication of efforts among research institutes do not occur. It is for this reason that the Secretary-General intends to initiate a comprehensive review of the functioning of the research institutes. This review would include an examination of the possibility of the United Nations University playing a stronger coordinating role in this area.